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National Theatre Workshop of Handicapped
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Special Education Resource Center
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Identifying And Serving Artistically Talented Students

School districts are required by Connecticut law (Section 10-76a) to identify students who demonstrate, or have the potential to demonstrate, high levels of performance or achievement in the visual and performing arts. Students who have special abilities in the arts are referred to as "talented" and those who have such abilities in other academic areas are referred to as "gifted." Many districts offer special programs to address the needs of these students. Some districts commonly incorporate artistic development into their core learning experiences for all gifted and talented students; others offer programs to develop talent in specific arts areas.

Each arts discipline involves different kinds of talent or ability, several of which are frequently overlooked when identifying talented students. The most commonly used identifier for exceptional artistic ability is a high level of achievement or performance. Such achievement often is defined by the level of created work in the visual arts and the level of performance in the performing arts. There are two major problems associated with the identification of students with potential or manifest talent in the visual and performing arts. The first concerns the underidentification of students with potential to achieve at high levels in these areas. Students who have had little opportunity to cultivate their skills, as is often the case in dance, rarely demonstrate high levels of achievement, so their potential abilities go unnoticed. Second, relying solely on these two broad areas – visual and performing arts – causes schools to neglect other important areas of talent. In the performing arts, creative ability often is overlooked. For example, students who have a knack for music composition or dance choreography may not demonstrate talent when performance skill is the sole criterion for identifying talent. In all of the arts, special analytical or critical ability often is overlooked. There are students who may not create or perform at an exceptional level, but who have a special knack for understanding, analyzing and critiquing what is happening in an art work or performance.

The first key to finding less-common types of talent is to offer *all* students a sufficiently comprehensive program so that special talents are nurtured and have an opportunity to surface. A second key is to begin such instruction early, preferably at the preschool level. Evidence suggests that artistic talent which is neglected in the early years of life may atrophy or disappear (Gor-

don, 1993). The third key is to apply a variety of criteria, rather than relying on a single yardstick, to identify exceptional ability. Assessments of artistic talent should investigate levels of created work, performance and critical understanding. Clark and Zimmerman (1992) recommend a multiple-criteria approach to the identification of such students that includes a variety of methods, depending upon a student's grade level, in-class observations, interview performance review, profile review, informal instruments, reviews of slides or videos, academic records, grades in art courses, work-sampling techniques, and self, peer, parent or teacher nominations.

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- National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC). website: www.nagc.org

MUSICALLY GIFTED

Many students in our public schools show strong interest, aptitude and performance ability in music. Of these, a certain number can be considered musically gifted. It is the responsibility of our educational system to identify these students and to provide unique opportunities to further develop their gift of musical talent.

Identification processes could begin as early as kindergarten. Young children who sing in tune easily, remember melodies and are rhythmically accurate should be first considered for screening. By the time a child reaches the age of 8 or 9, specific listening tests, such as the *Colwell Music Achievement Test* or one of the Gordon measures of music audiation, could be administered. Strong interest and success with musical performance activities, aesthetic sensitivity, proficiency in certain fine motor skills, and creative abilities in composition and improvisation also could be used as measurements.

Curriculum Design. Programs for musically gifted students can be designed in several ways, depending on the age level, specific needs and talents of students,

and resources available. Possible programs might include the following:

- Elementary-level eclectic exploratory music experiences within a class structure of musically gifted students. Activities will be geared one and one-half to two years higher than age level, and will emphasize such areas as creativity, ear training, movement activity and enrichment experiences.
- "Pull Out" or "TAG" programs, where gifted students have an opportunity to work individually or in small groups with professional musicians during or after school hours.
- Choral, instrumental or dance ensembles comprised of gifted students who perform at a level which far exceeds expectations of a given age group.

Administration. Many districts choose to administer and fund programs for the talented through the special education or special services department of a school district. The music department staff should assist with screening and be directly involved with curriculum design and instruction.

Resources. Several of the Gordon music aptitude tests—including the *Primary*, *Intermediate* and *Advanced Measures of Music Audiation*—are available from G.I.A. Publications in Chicago (708) 496-3800.

The Hamden Model: "Talent Identification Process." The Hamden, Conn., public schools have developed a successful Talent Identification Process (TIP) that is used to identify students with outstanding talent in dance, drama, music and visual arts. Experts in each arts area have designed the TIP process for that area.

The TIP process allows for nomination by teachers, parents and peers. Self-nomination also is permitted. Parents and teachers (both classroom and arts) are asked to complete an information form, which is reviewed by a special screening committee. All selected students then must participate in a variety of activities that assess their creativity and talent/potential. In dance and drama, for which there are limited programs, all students at a particular grade level might participate in a single screening activity. Trained professionals then select students for further assessment before making identifications.

Complete information about the TIP process can be obtained from the Hamden public schools at 60 Putnam Ave., Hamden, CT 06517-2825. Available materials include the Hamden Nomination Form, Parent Information Form and Teacher Information Form, rating sheets for creative movement (dance), and activities and rating sheets for drama (Grades 4-6) and visual arts (Grades 4-6 and 7-8).

Cooperative Learning In The Arts

Cooperative learning has gained great popularity as an effective instructional method at all levels and in all subject areas. An arts teacher who is interested in using cooperative learning should consult the resources listed or participate in professional development offerings on these strategies.

Cooperative learning involves small heterogeneous groups of students who use each other as a major resource, with the teacher acting as a consultant. Sometimes students learn better when they work with peers than when they learn on their own, or from adults. Cooperation is basic to human effectiveness, a keystone to building and maintaining families, careers, communities and all aspects of adult life. In cooperative learning the individual attains personal goals only when others in his or her group attain their goals. Such a setting mirrors the collaborative nature of many real-life work settings more closely than does the traditional, isolated approach to learning.

Cooperative learning goes far beyond traditional "group work" by incorporating the following five components into every lesson:

1. **Positive Interdependence.** Students must feel that they need each other to complete the group's task. This feeling is created by establishing mutual goals, offering joint rewards, sharing materials and information, and creating assigned roles for group members.
2. **Face-To-Face Interaction.** Beneficial educational outcomes grow from interaction patterns and verbal exchanges among students in structured cooperative learning groups. Types of verbal interchanges include oral summarizing, giving and receiving explanations, and elaborating on previous learning.
3. **Individual Accountability.** Cooperative learning groups are not successful until every member has mastered the assignment. Cooperative learning lessons frequently stress and assess individual learning so that group members can appropriately support and help each other.
4. **Interpersonal And Small-Group Skills.** Cooperative learning teaches students communication, leadership, trust, decision-making and conflict-management skills. The effective functioning of the group and

its success relies on the use of these skills.

5. **Group Processing.** This final important area gives students the time and procedures to analyze how well their groups are functioning and how well they are using the necessary social skills. Processing helps all group members achieve while maintaining effective working relationships among members.

From *Learning Together and Alone: Cooperative Competitive and Individualistic Learning*, by Johnson, D.W. and Johnson, Roger T., Needham, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1987. Used with permission.

Cooperative learning can be a useful method for the arts teacher, both in the general classroom and in the performance setting. Any concept that may be taught through teacher lecturing and individual assignment tasks may be restructured into a cooperative learning lesson.

In carrying out a cooperative learning lesson, the music teacher has four main tasks:

1. **Grouping Decisions.** The teacher must determine the size of the group, its heterogeneous makeup, how the room will be arranged, what materials will be needed and how group roles will be assigned. These decisions are crucial to the success of the lesson.
2. **Setting The Task And Positive Interdependence.** The teacher must develop a learning task that structures positive interdependence, individual accountability and intergroup cooperation, with criteria for success.
3. **Monitoring And Intervening.** Once the student groups understand the task and have begun to work, the teacher provides task assistance, monitors student behavior and intervenes when necessary. The teacher also provides lesson closure.
4. **Evaluating And Processing.** The teacher must evaluate individual student learning and, through processing, must assess group functioning (Johnson, et al, 1984).

Cooperative learning in performing arts classrooms often requires students to make more noise than is true in most other types of classes, such as when rehearsing music performance in a small (chamber) ensemble, acting out a theatre skit which the students have written and/or rehearsed, choreographing and/or dancing to music, and creating and/or performing a work. Instruc-

tional facilities for arts classes where cooperative learning will take place ideally should include separate sound-proofed rooms adjacent to and, preferably, visible from the main classroom. (For further discussion refer to the section of Chapter 3 titled Instructional Facilities on pages 150 and 151.)

SAMPLE MUSIC-TEACHING STRATEGIES USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING

Course: "Singing Folksongs Of The World"

1. Students learn four or five folksongs from different cultures. The teacher supplies a basic bibliography for each of the songs.
2. The class is divided into groups of four or five. Each group is assigned a cooperative research project centered around one of the songs the class is singing. Within the groups each student has a specific topic to explore. Topics are selected from the following list:

- cultural background of the song;
- geographical orientation;
- political structure of the region;
- analysis of the song;
- current status of the culture;
- text meaning; and
- social context of the song.

3. When students complete their research they will teach the other groups about the song. They will also present this information when they sing the songs in public.

Other Possible Strategies

Ensembles

1. Each group will listen to a rehearsal tape of a specific selection and analyze phrasing, intonation, style, dynamics, tempo, articulation and balance and/or blend. Groups will discuss ways to improve the performance and share the results with the full ensemble.
2. Each group is assigned a research project based on one of the scores being rehearsed. Each student has a specific topic to explore, such as: historical analysis, style, text meaning, composer or theoretical analysis. Projects will be shared with the other groups and the information will be included in the concert program notes.

General Music Classes

1. Each group will create appropriate instrumental accompaniments to familiar songs, using Orff and

rhythm instruments, and perform for the class.

2. Each group will practice a given selection on the recorder, keyboard or guitar and perform it for the class.
3. Each group will analyze a listening example according to the given criteria and share the results with the class.
4. Each group will create a composition according to the given criteria and perform the piece for the class.
5. The teacher explains the structure of the C major scale. Students work in groups to discover the sharps and flats in other major scales using keyboards and mallet instruments.
6. Students share the results and determine the patterns of organization among all major scales.

Source: Friedmann, M. "Stimulating Classroom Learning with Small Groups." *Music Educators Journal* 76, no. 2 (1989): 53 - 56.

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RESOURCES

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Introducing Theatre And Dance Into The Curriculum

The purpose of this section is to suggest strategies for educators and community members who wish to develop dance and theatre programs in their schools. Children need opportunities to study all of the arts. Unfortunately, arts programs in many schools are limited to music and the visual arts. Art and music programs are essential, but do not substitute for dance and theatre. General components of effective theatre and dance programs are outlined in Chapter 3, and explained in more detail in *Opportunity-to-Learn Standards for Arts Education* (NAEA, 1995), available from the National Art Education Association.

Who should teach dance and theatre?

As in any subject, quality learning in dance and theatre requires guidance from teachers who have skills and knowledge in those areas – i.e., teachers who can model,